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RABBINIC CONCEPTIONS OF REPENTANCE ¹.

WHEN the invitation reached me to become the President of this Society for the current year, my first impulse was to decline. I knew that both capacity and circumstance made me unqualified for the post. If second thoughts prompted acceptance, the reason was this: in no other country of Europe would it be even conceivable that the presidency of a theological society would be offered to a Jew. I was too proud of my country to refuse your invitation, and it seemed to me better that those present this afternoon should suffer for an hour than that a toleration and a liberality, which only England is willing to render, should not be put on record and carried into effect.

The subject on which I propose to speak to you has a permanent human interest, and is not of a recondite character. Some of the material, at any rate, which I have collected from the Rabbinical literature about Repentance may be unfamiliar to you. The manner of its presentation will therefore be of less importance.

¹ Presidential Address before the Society of Historical Theology. Oxford, October 29, 1903.

May I start in an egotistic and unscientific sort of way by a personal reminiscence? Only three or four generations separate the present speaker from what was in all probability a mediaeval and Rabbinical environment. May he then recall the teaching of his own childhood on the subject of repentance, and afterwards let it be seen how far this teaching was separated from, and how far it faithfully echoed, the teaching of the Talmudic Rabbis?

What I was taught about God and sin and repentance was exceedingly simple and easy. Perhaps it was too simple and too easy; but our business here is to state facts and not to assess their truth.

I was taught that I could be good if I chose: all sin was my own fault. If, however, I tried to be good, God would help my efforts. God was represented to me as just and loving, but his graciousness and pity were more dwelt upon than his justice. Though all wrongdoing is our own fault, no man is sinless, and God knows the weakness of human nature and is lenient accordingly. After death we shall doubtless receive some punishment for our sins, but such punishment will be for our purification and good. God punishes only as a kind human father punishes. There is no such thing as eternal punishment even for the worst sinner. And though we all sin, we can all repent, and God is ever ready to accept our repentance. As an earnest of his goodness, he has given us the great Day of Atonement to help us to repent and to assure us of his goodness and mercy. *Our* repentance and *his* goodness may rightly give us cheering confidence and buoyant hope.

Such was the teaching with which I was familiar. You historians will smile when I tell you that it was presented to me as the teaching of Moses. It was also said to apply to all men, whether Jew or Gentile, because theological belief was indifferent to God, who only looked to conduct and character.

Thus when we were told or when we read—perhaps surreptitiously—that some people believed that the world

was under wrath, that many persons were doomed to eternal perdition, and that it was hard to be saved, it all seemed exceedingly odd and even absurd. For *everybody* will be "saved," and if you are anxious to be good, and if you repent of your faults, what can you want more, or why should you be anxious and depressed?

This was Jewish teaching in the last quarter of the nineteenth century after Christ. How far was it Rabbinic teaching? We shall find the answer to that question as we proceed.

The Rabbinic doctrine of Repentance is naturally based upon the Old Testament. Upon the varying conceptions of God and of his relation to man found in the Hebrew Bible the unsystematic and inconsistent religion of the Rabbis was reared. What we roughly call the Priestly and the Prophetic elements of the Old Testament both reappear in the Talmudic religion in a more or less successful harmony.

Repentance in the Old Testament is essentially a religious conception, and is constantly and closely connected with eschatological ideas of the Judgment and of the Messianic Age. To a considerable extent it preserves this character in the Rabbinical literature. It may be well to state here that I shall make no reference to any passages or theories concerning repentance which may be gathered from the apocryphal, apocalyptic, or pseud-epigraphic writings. These sources are now easily accessible and fairly well known. It is, however, very noticeable, first, that nothing of great importance about repentance can be obtained from this quarter. The total amount of material is very small, and its quality on the whole is poor. Secondly, whereas the mixture of Hellenism with Judaism sometimes improved and spiritualized a given doctrine or created interesting novelties and developments, the reverse is the case with the subject of repentance. Sirach is better on repentance than the Wisdom of Solomon. The whole doctrine is genuinely and purely Hebraic, and Hellenism does not

improve it. On the contrary, it tends to dry it up. Philo has little to say about repentance, and what he does say is of small account. In the New Testament the doctrine of Repentance is of importance in the Synoptics and in Acts, it is hardly touched upon in the epistles of St. Paul, and is wholly absent from the Fourth Gospel. Repentance is an emphatically Hebraic conception, and its full development is a genuine and specific excellence of Rabbinical and post-Rabbinical Judaism ¹.

There is no Hebrew noun in the Bible which exactly corresponds to our noun "repentance" ². The verb נחם seems to mean "to be sorry, to feel pain or regret," and thus closely corresponds to the root-meaning of our word "repentance." It is, however, mainly used in reference to God. Of human regret, or repentance, it only occurs some six or seven times ³. It does not appear to have acquired the particular connotation which was wanted. The root which was ultimately adopted, and of which only the verb is used in this sense in the Old Testament, had at once a more distinctly religious and also a more definitely practical significance. This verb is *shub*, which we usually translate by "turn" or "return." It never quite obtained a technical meaning. It is used either of turning from evil or of

¹ Cf. a striking note of F. Delitzsch in his Hebrew translation of the Epistle to the Romans. He alludes to a passage in the Pesikta Kahana, 163 b (which I shall subsequently quote) and says it is one, "wo der Unterschied der jüdischen und christlichen Anschauung in die Augen springt. Nach jener lässt sich Gott versöhnen durch Busse, nach dieser ist er versöhnt durch das Mittlerwerk Christi, und wird dem Einzelnen versöhnt, wenn dieser bussfertig und gläubig sich auf das der ganzen Menschheit geltende Mittlerwerk gründet. Die neutestamentliche Heilsordnung Gottes lautet auch wie *jer. Maccoth* ii. 6 יֵשׁוּעַ הַשְׂמוּחָ וַיְחַפֵּר לָךְ, aber die Busse ist nicht das Sühnende selbst, sondern nur der Weg zur Versöhnung." (*Paulus des Apostels Brief an die Römer . . . in das Hebräische übersetzt von Franz Delitzsch*, 1870, p. 81.)

² נחם in Hosea xiii. 14 is doubtful. If the text is correct, it means rather "pity" than "repentance."

³ See Exod. xiii. 17; Num. xxiii. 19; Judges xxi. 6; 1 Sam. xv. 29; Job xlii. 6; Jer. viii. 6, xxxi. 19.

turning to God. Its untechnical character is shown by the fact that it is also occasionally used to signify a turning away from God and rectitude. The noun *Teshubah*, which in the Talmudical literature is even more distinctly a precise theological term than repentance with us, is, in the Old Testament only found in a non-religious sense. At what period *Teshubah* was first used to mean repentance, or at any rate "a turning away from sin and a turning towards God," cannot be exactly ascertained. I believe that, so far, the word has not been found in the Hebrew original of Sirach. We are therefore unable to trace it back beyond the Mishnah and the Eighteen Benedictions. But the best scholars are more and more coming to believe that a considerable number of these Benedictions are pre-Christian, and reach back to the Maccabæan era. In that case a famous and familiar prayer would be the earliest use of the word *Teshubah* in its new meaning of repentance which we are able to adduce. Let me quote this prayer at once, for so much of the Rabbinic doctrine of Repentance is contained in it: "Cause us to return, O our Father, unto thy Law; draw us near, O our King, unto thy service, and bring us back in perfect repentance unto thy presence. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who delightest in repentance."

The opening phrase "Cause us to return" is Biblical. For the verb *shub* is used not merely in the active, but also in the causative sense, and this usage is of great importance. Few sentences from Scripture are more familiar to Jewish ears than the verse in Lamentations: "Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old."

It may be noted that *shub*, though more frequently connected with Israel and the community, is also applied to individuals. It is constantly followed by the ideas of pardon and restoration, or the annulment of intended punishment. It is a prophetic word, and rather religious than ethical. Apostasy from God can be healed by *shub*. Amos already employs the term, and the latest prophets

do not neglect it. It is congenial to the prophetic element in the book of Deuteronomy and to writers of the Deuteronomic school. Some of its instances acquired an intenser meaning, and are used again and again as texts by the Rabbinical fathers. Thus, to mention but two or three, we have the appeal of Hosea, "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God ; take with you words, and turn to the Lord," quoted, played upon, and developed an innumerable number of times. The same may be said of the summons "Return thou backsliding Israel" in Jeremiah, or of Ezekiel's chapter about the wicked man who turns from his evil way and is forgiven. The divine readiness to receive the penitent, of which we shall hear so much, is often illustrated by Zechariah and Malachi's exhortation, "Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord." And where *shub* is used in quite a different signification and does not mean repentance at all, the Rabbis often interpret it in the familiar sense, with results which are sometimes almost amusing in their strange and strained ingenuity.

Thus, so far as the Old Testament is concerned, there is a good deal of basis for that theory of repentance which I mentioned as having been taught to Jewish children at the present time. But this prophetic doctrine is crossed by the priestly and sacrificial ideas of atonement, purification, and forgiveness, which also obtained an enormous hold upon the minds and hearts of the Jewish people. The mixture produced by the two different strains of teaching was never wholly brought into harmony by the Rabbis, though the prophetic element is largely predominant, and gives ethical colour and tone to the priestly conceptions. But theoretic consistency was never achieved.

The priestly ideas to which I refer centre in the institutions of the sin-offering and of the Day of Atonement. Of these the sin-offering became of diminishing importance. Even before the destruction of the Temple, it is clear that the ethical substitutes for the sin-offering, which afterwards became all-prevailing, had begun their

beneficial influence. A large number of persons were unable to come up to Jerusalem to offer the statutory sacrifices. Moreover, even in the Pentateuch itself, the sin-offering and the guilt-offering are usually associated with involuntary offences; they are not supposed to be applicable or efficacious in the case of serious moral transgressions deliberately committed. Nevertheless, traces occur in the Rabbinical literature of a less ethical conception of the sacrificial system. Thus we find it stated several times that no man in Jerusalem was burdened, or passed the night, with a consciousness of sin. For the morning sacrifice atoned for the sins of the night and the evening sacrifice for those of the day¹. Or, again, it is said, "As a man goes down to the brook dirty and comes up clean, so a man went up to the sanctuary with sins and came forth without them²." But on the whole the exaltation of the sacrifices is used rather to emphasize the necessity for their ethical substitutes—prayer, charity, and repentance—now that the possibility of sacrifices had passed away. For he who truly repents "is regarded by God as if he had gone to Jerusalem, rebuilt the altar and offered all the sacrifices of the law³." It became a definite doctrine of the Rabbis that the substitutes for sacrifice are more potent than sacrifice⁴.

Far more important, however, than all other sacrifices, whether of the individual or of the community, were the ordinances of the Day of Atonement. Moreover, the Day of Atonement, though in the Pentateuchal legislation its essence and efficacy consisted in rites and sacrifices, which ceased when the Temple was destroyed, maintained and even increased its significance and solemnity after the sacrifices and the rites had disappeared. The persistence of the Day of Atonement's atoning efficacy

¹ Bemidbar Rabba, Par. xxi. § 21 (ed. Wilna). Pesikta Kahana, 55 b, 61 b (ed. Buber).

² Midrash Tehillim on Ps. v. § 1.

³ Vayikra Rabba, vii. § 2, &c.

⁴ Bemidbar Rabba, xiii. § 18.

independently of the Temple produced momentous effects in the Jewish religion, and was operative both for good and for evil.

It is impossible and needless to enter here upon a discussion of the objects and limitations of the Day of Atonement ordinance as laid down in the sixteenth chapter of Leviticus. We must, however, note first that the atoning power of the Day seems to reside in the rites performed by the priest, including the sacrifices and the scapegoat; and secondly that, in spite of certain qualifying implications elsewhere, the atonement was apparently efficacious for every kind of transgression. The words are, "on that day shall he make an atonement for you to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from *all* your sins before the Lord." Yet clearly, before the Temple was destroyed, a double process had set in. In the first place, the Day itself with its fasting and confession had acquired a solemn significance and value over and above the sacrifices and the scapegoat and the blood. Secondly, the Day became spiritualized. A deeper view of sin and of repentance grew up, a nobler conception of forgiveness and atonement. The local synagogues in every village and town aided both these developments. Hence the Day of Atonement survived the fall of the Temple, and its holy importance was even increased by that tragic event. On the one hand, it afforded room for a certain growth of superstition and formalism; on the other hand, it supplied opportunity for lofty thoughts and high endeavour. Sometimes the two strains or tendencies are oddly fused together. Fasting and prayer, repentance and "good works," ritualism independent of sacrifice and high doctrine transcending it, enabled the people and their teachers to overcome the shock of the Temple's loss, and to fashion a religion far superior to that of the priests¹.

¹ Cp. throughout the informing and interesting articles on Atonement and the Day of Atonement in the Jewish Encyclopaedia.

Yet Judaism could hardly have survived the days of Titus and of Hadrian had it not been that by that time the doctrine of a future life was ingrained into the hearts of all. As Gunkel has well said, that dogma marks an epoch and a dividing line. On the one side is the Judaism which precedes it, on the other the Judaism which comes after. The famous story of the son who at the request of his father climbs a tree, fetches the eggs, and lets the parent bird go free—thereby fulfilling two Pentateuchal commands by a single act—and who then falls down and is killed, shows the measure of the change. For, according to the story, the promise of the fifth commandment was not made void by the son's fall, but, on the contrary, was confirmed. For the promise of "length of days" was realized in the life to come¹. Our own immediate subject is also changed, like all other religious conceptions, by the doctrine of the resurrection. For repentance becomes not only connected with the redemption of Israel in the Messianic age, but also with the lot of each individual Israelite at the last judgment, and in the world to come. The solemnity of life, and the tremendous issues with which right and wrong are charged, were vastly increased.

According to a familiar passage in the Mishnah, further elaborated in the Talmud, the world receives its yearly judgment in the penitential season between New Year and the Day of Atonement. I cannot go into the origin or even the details of this curious conception. It is sufficient to notice that this strange idea undoubtedly exercised a very considerable influence upon religion and upon action. The Talmud states that three books are opened on New Year's day: the righteous are inscribed for life, the wicked for death, while the "intermediate" remain in suspense till the Day of Atonement. By good works and repentance they can make the swaying balance incline in their favour. Moreover, even the wicked—this seems the general idea—can cause the inscribed decree to be cancelled.

¹ Kiddushin, 39 b.

Such is the power of repentance¹. These odd conceptions had effects for good and evil. They produced a certain amount of formal charity, and of "good works" in the bad sense of the word, in the interval between New Year and the Day of Atonement. They produced some mere outward repentance and formalism, both then and upon the Day of Atonement itself. The notion that God was especially near to man, anxious and eager to pardon during the penitential season, was not entirely healthy. But, on the other hand, as repentance meant reparation and change of life, it is certain that many a quarrel was made up, many an injury made good, many a sin abandoned, many a good action accomplished. A real and lasting reformation of character was sometimes initiated, together with a deepening of the desire of the soul for closer communion with God.

The same double result was and still is the consequence of the Day of Atonement. For our present purpose we must note that the prevailing view, even when the juridical effect of the Day of Atonement is under discussion, is that while for some sins repentance is inadequate to secure immediate forgiveness, there is no sin for which the Day of Atonement without repentance can achieve the divine pardon. The famous Mishnah in Yoma (viii. 8) runs as follows: "Death and the Day of Atonement atone together with repentance; repentance atones for light sins, whether of omission or commission; for heavy sins repentance holds the matter in suspense, till the Day of Atonement comes and atones²." Here there is no atonement without repentance, but the Day of Atonement is required to complete the efficacy of the repentance. In another passage, however (Mishnah Shebuoth, i. 6), the scapegoat is stated to atone for all sins, and no mention is made of repentance. The words are "Other sins mentioned in the Law [besides the

¹ Cf. e.g. Rosh Ha-Shanah, 17 b; Yebamoth, 105 a; Pesikta Kahana, 163 a.

² Cf. Yoma, 85 b.

pollution of the sanctuary], whether light or grave, voluntary or involuntary, . . . are atoned for by the scapegoat." But this Mishnah, though supported by R. Jehudah the Prince, is contradicted by a subsequent R. Jehudah, and other authorities are also quoted to the effect that the atoning efficacy of the scapegoat only applies to those who have repented of their sins¹. In the Jerusalem Talmud another suggestion is made, namely, that the Day of Atonement brings pardon even without repentance for sins of omission, whereas for sins of commission (always regarded as more serious by the Talmudists) repentance is an indispensable condition². Rabbi Ishmael taught that there were four classes of atonement, and repentance was necessary for them all. "If a man transgress a *negative* commandment, and repent, he is forgiven at once; if he transgress a *positive* commandment, and repent, repentance holds the matter in suspense, till the Day of Atonement comes and atones. If he sin in matters involving the penalty of being 'cut off from his people,' or death at the hand of the Synhedrin, repentance and the Day of Atonement hold the matter in suspense, and sufferings complete the atonement. But if he has profaned the divine name, repentance cannot hold the matter in suspense, the Day of Atonement cannot atone, and sufferings cannot complete the atonement, but they all together can (only) hold the matter in suspense, and death completes the atonement³." Maimonides, in his codification of the

¹ Shebuoth, 12 b-13 b. Cf. also Commentaries on Mishnah Shebuoth, i. 6 (I. A.).

² Jer. Yoma, viii. 6 (Schwab, V, p. 255).

³ Yoma, 86 a; Aboth d. R. Nathan, c. 29. The same passage occurs with slight variants in Mechilta on Exod. xx. 7, p. 39 a (ed. Friedmann) and also in the Tossefta to Yoma, xi. Further discussion upon the precise power of repentance to effect by itself expiation and forgiveness is found in Yoma, 85 b fin. and 86 a init. As negative commands are more important than positive commands (i. e. sins of commission are worse than sins of omission), it is asked: Why does the Mishnah say that Repentance atones both for light sins of commission and *omission*? for if it atones for sins of commission, *a fortiori* it atones for sins of omission.

Talmudic Law, says that the scapegoat, without repentance, atoned only for slight transgressions; but I have not found a similar formula in the Talmuds¹. In any case Maimonides makes a sharp distinction between the scapegoat and the Day of Atonement itself, and he proceeds to observe that, since the destruction of the Temple, "There is nothing left us but repentance, which, however, atones for all transgressions." And undoubtedly this is the prevailing Rabbinic view. Without repentance, no rites and no Day of Atonement can atone; with repentance, no sin can separate between man and God².

It may be desirable to quote a few passages in order to show the combination of lower and higher thought which sometimes occurs as regards the penitential season and the Day of Atonement. It may more accurately be said that these passages show, not so much a fusion or combination of higher and lower thought, as a desire to adjust the purer conceptions of repentance to the letter of the Priestly Law. For the Talmudists oscillated, as it were, unconsciously between two opposing doctrines. On the one hand, repentance and goodness are superior to sacrifice, and therefore the existing means of atonement are superior to the old sacrificial system; on the other hand, the sacrificial system, like every other part of the Law, is perfect and divine, its loss a punishment and a deprivation, its return certain and desirable.

R. Jehudah then suggests that the sins of commission meant are not such sins of commission as consist in the transgression of a negative command *pur et simple*, but only those sins of commission which consist in the transgression of such negative commands *as depend upon a positive command* (I suppose e. g. that the transgression of Exodus xxxv. 3 would be a sin of commission consisting in the transgression of a negative command depending upon the positive command of Exodus xx. 8).

¹ It may be, as suggested by a commentator (גליק חס"ט) on the last words of Jer. Yoma, viii. 6, that Maimonides derived his view from that passage, which is indeed somewhat corrupt in the editions (I. A.).

² Cp. Tossefta Yoma, iv. 10: "Sin-offering and guilt-offering and death and the Day of Atonement do not expiate without repentance," though R. Jehudah argues that the day of death is equivalent to repentance.

Thus, for instance, the famous words "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" were interpreted to mean, "Seek him specially between New Year and the Day of Atonement when he dwells among you." During that short season the inscribed decree, not yet sealed till the Kippur day, was still susceptible of revocation and annulment. But these reflections are modified by others. It is asserted that to a *community* God is near at *all* times, and in other passages the whole conception of finality at the Day of Atonement is practically abandoned¹. More than once we meet with the following: "On the eve of the New Year the great (? pious) ones of a given generation fast, and God remits them a third of their sins; from New Year to Atonement individuals fast, and God remits them a third of their sins; on the Atonement Day all fast, and God says: What is done is done; from this time a new reckoning begins²." Elsewhere, too, the seeming importance of fasting is insisted on. Thus we read "When the Temple existed, a man brought a sacrifice, and it made atonement for him; now that the Temple is no more our soul is raised to thee in fasting, and thou reckonest the affliction of our souls as a perfect sacrifice, and we have nothing to which to cling but thy mercy³." Or, again, a Rabbi says, "May the diminution of my fat and blood be regarded as if I had offered them upon the altar⁴." But one must not suppose that any but superstitious and foolish persons, who exist in all religious communities, believed that the fast, however imperative, was of avail without repentance and change of life. The familiar saying about the Ninevites marks the true Rabbinic position⁵, "My brethren, it is not said of the Ninevites that God saw their sackcloth and their fasting, but that God saw their *works*, that they turned from their evil way." "Be not like the fools," say the

¹ Pesikta Kahana, 156 b; Rosh Ha-Shanah, 16 a, b; Yebamoth, 105 a, &c.

² Koheleth Rabba on ix. 7; Vayikra Rabba, xxx. § 7.

³ Midrash Tehillim on Ps. xxv. (3).

⁴ Berachoth, 17 a.

⁵ Mishnah Taanith, ii. 1 and Talmud, 15 a, 16 a.

teachers, "who when they sin bring a sacrifice, but do not repent. They know not the difference between good and evil, and yet venture to make an offering to God¹." Several other passages could be quoted of similar import.

In other ways, too, the universality of the Day of Atonement's efficacy was curtailed. The same Mishnah in Yoma (viii. 9) goes on to say: "If a man says, I will sin and repent, I will sin and repent, he is not allowed to repent. If a man says, I will sin, and the Day of Atonement will atone, for him the Day will bring no forgiveness. For sins between man and God the Day of Atonement brings forgiveness, for sins between man and man the Day brings no forgiveness until he is reconciled with his neighbour." The first two of these clauses indicate the anxiety of the Rabbis to prevent the Atonement Day from degenerating into sheer superstition and thus doing more harm than good. Hence the importance of the doctrine that for certain sins or for certain attitudes of mind repentance is impossible, or, as they put it, prevented. It may be convenient to indicate the views of the Rabbinic fathers upon the divine element in repentance, both in the way of aiding and of impeding its accomplishment.

There is no doubt that the Rabbis were strong believers in the freedom of the will. It is a man's own fault if he sins; under normal circumstances he can be good if he chooses. Ordinarily, moreover, it is never too late to mend. It may indeed be argued that, like Ezekiel, they taught a somewhat too atomistic kind of ethical psychology, as if a man could at his own will jump from virtue to vice or from vice to virtue. The dictum that God judges a man according to his present moral condition is constantly repeated². Yet the other side of the question is also not neglected, and it would be false to think that the Rabbis did not believe in divine help towards the achievement of rectitude or in the struggle for repentance. A famous passage in Yoma, often quoted elsewhere, though Maimonides misinterprets it

¹ Berachoth, 23 a.

² Cf. e. g. Bereshit Rabba, liii. § 14.

in the interests of his own combative theology, is quite conclusive upon this point. "For him who would pollute himself, the doors are open; he who would purify himself, is helped." The simile which follows strengthens and explains the adage. "It is like with the seller of naphtha and balsam; if a man buys naphtha, the seller says: measure it yourself; if he buys balsam, the other says: wait and I will help you measure, that we may both be perfumed." "Our father and king," runs the familiar supplication, "bring us back in perfect repentance unto thy presence¹." "It is never too late to mend," like most proverbs, represents one side of a complex truth. And so the Rabbis have no consistent theory, but give expression to the various facts of life as they crop up or occur to them.

Thus we read in a quaint passage of the Midrash, the environment of which it would be a shame to cut off: "It says in Canticles: His mouth (lit. palate) is most sweet. That is God. As it says in Amos: Seek me and live. Is there a sweeter palate than this? It says in Ezekiel: I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Is there a sweeter mouth than this? If a man has all his life been a complete sinner, and at the end becomes completely righteous, he will no longer stumble against wickedness, and God will account his former sins as merits, for it says: Myrrh, aloes and cassia are all thy sins [here by a slight change of vowels the Midrash changes the *garments* of the original (Ps. xlv) into *sins*!]. Thus his sins against God are as myrrh and aloes at the season of his contrition²."

The Talmudists admit the possibility of deathbed repentances, and there are some good stories and striking adages on the subject. Thus, when R. Meir urges his teacher Elisha b. Abuja to repent of his apostasy, the sinner replies, "Up till when will they receive me?" and the answer is, "till the very hour of death." "God leaves

¹ Yoma, 38 b, 39 a; Singer's Prayer-book, p. 56.

² Bemidbar Rabba, x. § 1; cf. Jer. Peah, 4 b (Schwab, II, p. 20); Shemot Rabba, xxxi. § 1; Kiddushin, 40 b.

the chance of repentance open even in the very moment of his judgment." Of a Rabbi, whose sin of unchastity was notorious, the story is told, that in the very hour and passion of his sin, a fervour of repentance befalls him. He rushes forth and calls on the hills, and on heaven and earth, and on sun and moon and stars to implore for him compassion from God, but they reply, each quoting a verse of scripture, that they have enough to do in asking compassion for themselves. Then he cries and laments till his soul leaves him, and a heavenly voice is heard to say that R. Eleasar b. Durdaja is destined for the world to come. Thus repentance and death atone for the most grievous sin. The remark with which R. Jehudah the Prince receives the story is a frequent one in the Talmud: "Many can gain the world to come only after years and years, while another gains it in an hour." And on this occasion the same Rabbi adds the quaint expression: "Not enough that the penitent are received, they are even called Rabbi¹!"

Still though the general tone of the Rabbis is joyful and encouraging, God being represented as eager to induce the sinner to repent up till the very last possible moment, they are not unaware that the evil inclination, the sinful tendency, at first weak as a spider's web, may become, through repeated sins, as strong as a cart-rope. At first a guest, it is at last the master of the house. The doctrine of habit is not unknown to them. Thus they say: "If a man has the chance to sin once or twice and he resists, he will not sin again." "If you do not commit a sin three times, God will keep you from committing it for ever." Sin hardens man's heart. "If a man pollutes himself a little, they pollute him much; if a man sanctifies himself a little, they sanctify him much²." Frequently the sentence

¹ Midrash Ruth, vi. § 4. Tanchuma תנחומא (Bacher, *Agada der paläst. Amoräer*, II, p. 360, n. 4). Aboda Zarah, 17 a, 18 a; cf. Bereshit Rabba, lxxv. § 22.

² Yoma, 38 b, 39 a. "They pollute him" is almost equivalent to "He is polluted."

occurs, "If a man has committed the same sin twice, it seems to him to be permitted¹." And the warning is uttered: "A man is forgiven for his first offence and for his second and third, but not for the fourth." In one place among the five kinds of sinners for whom there is no repentance, figure those "who sin in order to repent, and those who repent much and always sin afresh²." In another passage we read: "He who says I will sin and repent, is forgiven three times and then no more." These quaint phrases, with their seemingly absurd precision, are all half-playfully deduced in odd and far-fetched ways from Biblical sentences or words: they must not be taken literally, but in their spirit.

More serious is the doctrine that for some sins repentance is impossible. Over and over again we have the saying: "For him who sins and causes others to sin no repentance is allowed or possible³." The hardening of Pharaoh's heart is explained and justified on the theory that after giving several chances of repentance to a man, God shuts his heart against repentance, so that he may punish him for his sins⁴. "He who is wholly given up to sin, is unable to repent, and there is no forgiveness to him for ever⁵." The idea that he who causes the many to sin will not be allowed to repent is partly due to the common Talmudic doctrine that the worst sin is making others sin, just as the highest goodness is helping others to be good. But it is also partly to be accounted for by the very practical conception of repentance entertained by the Rabbis. The usual critics of the Rabbinic religion may say that this practical conception of repentance is a mark of legalism. That the Rabbinic equivalent of the verb "repent" is to "do repentance" has actually been used as an argument to show that Rabbinic repentance is a

¹ Yoma, 86 b, &c.

² Yoma, 86 b; Aboth R. Nathan, 39 and 40.

³ Aboth, v. 26; Sanhedrin, 107 b.

⁴ Shemot Rabba, Par. xi. § 1 and 3.

⁵ Midrash Tehillim on Ps. 1 fin.

mere outward rite, an *opus operatum*¹. The criticism is groundless and unjust, but it is true that to the Rabbis the essence of repentance lay in such a thorough change of mind that it issues in change of life and change of conduct. To repent from the fear of God is better than to repent through chastisement or suffering, and to repent from love is better than to repent from fear². The true penitent is he who has the opportunity to do the same sin again, in the same environment, and who does it not³. To repent in old age of the sins of manhood or youth is of no great merit or avail⁴. It is, moreover, of the essence of repentance that the injury done to his neighbour should be repaired by the sinner, and the pardon of that neighbour obtained. This is the meaning of the Mishnah that the sins of a man against his neighbour cannot be forgiven before satisfaction has been rendered and reconciliation secured. Although, from one point of view, nothing can be worse than idolatry or apostasy, yet the Talmudists also lay down the maxim that as he who is good towards heaven and towards his fellow men is a good "Zadik," and he who is good towards heaven and bad towards his fellow men is a *not good* "Zadik," so he who is wicked against heaven and wicked against his fellow men is a bad sinner, while he who is wicked against heaven, but not wicked against his fellow men, is a *not bad* sinner⁵.

In accordance with this view the Talmudic prescriptions about practical repentance are very pressing and precise. So far as an injury could be undone, it was essential to cancel it as a condition of reconciliation with God. Reparation is a test of sincerity. Thus we find in Yoma: "R. Isaac said: If a man affronts his neighbour, though only in words,

¹ Cp. my article on "Rabbinic Judaism and the Epistles of St. Paul," *J. Q. R.*, Jan., 1901, p. 202; Weber, *Jüdische Theologie*, 2nd ed. (1897), p. 261, and the note on p. 409.

² Yoma, 86 a.

³ Yoma, 86 b.

⁴ This seems the meaning of the saying in Aboda Zarah, 19 a, but cf. also, for the other side, the graceful passage Succah, 53 a.

⁵ Kiddushin, 40 a.

he must appease him. If he can be appeased by a gift of money, spare it not if thou hast it, but if not, get friends to appease him. R. Hisda said: Thou must ask his pardon before three friends, and must ask it three times, and, says R. José b. Chanina, not more. R. Joseph b. Habo said: If the man thou hast wronged has died, thou must take ten persons with thee to his grave and say, I have sinned against the Lord and against this man whom I wronged." The story is told that one Rabbi went to the house of another offended Rabbi on the eve of thirteen successive Days of Atonement to ask his forgiveness. Even though the wronger has made complete reparation in kind, says the Mishnah (*Baba Kamma*, viii. 7), his deed is not forgiven till he has asked pardon from the wronged. Why it is said that pardon need not be asked more than three times depends partly upon an odd interpretation of a Biblical verse and partly upon the idea that if a man has been three times publicly besought by another to forgive him and still refuses, then the sin reverts to him and leaves the original offender. The refuser is called cruel (*Achzari*) and is false to the character of the true Israelite. The adages occur: "If a man yields his rights, his sins are forgiven." "God forgives him who forgives his neighbour." "So long as we are merciful, God is merciful to us; if we are not merciful to others, God is not merciful to us¹." And it is from the practical point of view, though rather oddly exaggerated, that complete repentance is considered as impossible or difficult to those persons who, from the very nature of their sin, cannot make a complete restitution. Thus he who makes others sin is unable to undo his wrong, for he cannot know or reach all those whom he has influenced for evil. This seems to be the real reason of his inability to become a perfect penitent, rather than the fantastic explanation in *Yoma* that it would never do for him to be in heaven and

¹ *Yoma*, 87 a, b; *Jer. Yoma*, viii. 8; *Baba Mezia*, 115 a; *Rosh Ha-Shanah*, 17 a; *Jer. Baba Kamma*, viii. 8 (*Schwab*, X, p. 67); *Tossefta Baba Kamma*, ix; *Yoma*, 23 a; *Megilla*, 28 a.

his deluded disciples in hell. So we are told that it is difficult for shepherds and tax-collectors to repent, the idea being that they do not know the actual persons whom they have wronged and thus cannot make complete restitution¹. We must, however, take these utterances with a grain of salt. From what is said about repentance elsewhere, it would seem impossible to believe that the Rabbis actually meant that a shepherd, even though he had fed his flock upon various meadows whose owners were unknown to him, or if he had forgotten to whom they belonged, or the particular spots where he had pastured his sheep, would not be forgiven by God if his repentance were sincere. Perhaps their meaning is rather that wrongs committed against indefinite persons are not merely less easy to repair, but more usually persisted in and less frequently regretted and abandoned.

However this may be, it is certain that the real stress of the Rabbis was laid upon the *sincerity* of repentance. That is why they talk so often about the question of repeated sins and repeated confessions². If a repentance does not produce a change of heart and deed, what can it be worth? Thus they say that it is useless to confess with the mouth till the heart overflows with repentance. Quoting as usual the Hosean bidding, "Take with you words," the Pesikta remarks: "God says to the Israelites I do not exact of you sacrifices or sin-offerings, but that you appease me with prayer and supplication and the collection of the heart³. 'Take words,' yet not mere empty words, but confession

¹ Baba Kamma, 94 b, and Wuensche's explanatory note, ii. 2, p. 42. In Maimonides' section on Repentance, chap. iv, the list of such persons is considerably extended.

² Cf. the many discussions as to whether old or repeated sins are or are not to be confessed again upon successive Days of Atonement. Cf. Yoma, 86 b; Shemot R., lli. § 2; Mid. Tehillim, xxxii. (2); Jer. Yoma, viii. 9 (Schwab, V, p. 257).

³ The Rabbinic *קולל* can hardly be better rendered into English than by the word "collection" (cf. German *Sammlung*). It seems a pity that Dr. Murray has no later quotation than 1868.

and prayer and tears." Familiar and frequent is the saying: "If a man has an unclean thing in his hands, he may wash them in all the seas of the world and he will never be clean. If he throw it away, a little water will quite suffice ¹."

The Rabbis were far from confining the need or utility of repentance to the penitential season from New Year to the Day of Atonement. Very common with them is the saying, "Repent one day before thy death." When his disciples said to R. Eleazar: "Does then a man know when he will die?" he answered: "the more necessary that he repent to-day. Then if he die to-morrow, all his days will have been passed in penitence, as it says: Let thy garments be always white ²."

For repentance is the great mediatorial bond between God and man. It entered into the divine plan from the beginning. Hence the frequent doctrine that Repentance was one of the seven things created before the world. "God," it says in one passage, "marked out the whole world, and it could not stand till he created repentance ³." It seems that at first the tradition ran that *six* things were created before the world. To these R. Ahaba added repentance, and his addition became so popular and was so much quoted that the six things were enlarged to seven, of which repentance is always one ⁴. Though we meet the view that God exacts requital (for the insistence on his eagerness to meet the sinner half-way led some, perchance, to think that he was all too easy-going in his compassion and forgiveness), yet the fundamental notion is that, as God chose to create man frail and liable to sin, the only thing for God to do was to aid him to repentance and to be ever

¹ Midrash Tehillim on Ps. xlv. § 4; Pesikta Rabbati, 198 b (ed. Friedmann); Echa Rabba on iii. 40.

² Aboth, ii. 14; Sabbath, 153 a; Mid. Tehillim on Ps. xc. (16); Koheleth Rabba on ix. 8.

³ Pirke R. Eliezer, chap. iii.

⁴ Bereshit Rabba, i. § 4; Nedarim, 39 a, &c., &c. Cf. Bacher, *Agada der palästinensischen Amoräer*, II, 510, III, 656, and his excellent notes. In the note (4) on iii. 656, for Berachoth, 54 a read Pesachim, 54 a.

ready to forgive him. In one passage in the Midrash, Abraham is made to say to God: "Thou canst not lay hold of the cord at both ends at once. If thou desirest strict justice, the world cannot endure; if thou desirest the preservation of the world, strict justice cannot endure¹."

Repentance, therefore, is a constant necessity. It is often compared with the sea, which is always accessible. Men can bathe in it at every hour. So the gates of repentance are ever wide open for all who wish to enter². God is represented as willing and even anxious to welcome the penitent. Sentences like the following are usual: "God says, My hands are stretched out towards the penitent: I thrust none back who gives me his heart in repentance." "God's hand is stretched out under the wings of the heavenly chariot to snatch the penitent from the grasp of justice." "He holds no creature for unworthy, but opens the door to all at every hour: he who would enter can enter." "Open for me," says God, "a gateway of repentance as big as a needle's eye, and I will open for you gates wide enough for horses and chariots." "If your sins are as high as heaven, even unto the seventh heaven and even to the throne of glory, and you repent, I will receive you³."

God is constantly represented as pleading with the Israelites to prove to them that repentance is within their power. If Israel says, "we are poor, we have no offerings to make," God replies, "I need only words." If they say, "we know nothing" [for by 'words' the Midrash means the words of the Law], God says, "Then weep and pray before me, and I will accept your prayer." Or, again: "The Israelites say, Lord, if we repent, will you accept our repentance? And God replies, I have accepted the repentance of Cain and Ahab and Jeconiah and Manasseh,

¹ Vayikra R., x. § 1.

² Echa R. on iii. 43; Mid. Tehillim on Ps. lxxv. (4); Debarim R., ii. § 12.

³ Shemot R., xii. § 4; Pesachim, 119 a; Mid. Tehillim on Ps. cxx. (7); Shir R. on v. 2; Pesikta R., 185 a.

and shall I not accept yours?" Or God and the Israelites are compared to a king and to the king's son who had gone from his father a journey of 100 days; when he was urged to return to his father, he said, I cannot. Then his father sent to say, "Return as far as you can, and I will come to you the rest of the way¹." God loves the penitent. Thus it is said: "As a man joins the two feet of a bed, or as a man puts two boards together," so God brings the repentant near to him². Several times we meet with the saying that what is rejected in the sacrificial beasts is acceptable in man, that is, the bruised and contrite heart. Or again: "Broken vessels are a disgrace for a man to use, but God loves the broken heart." "Him who repents of his sin, God honours: he gives him a name of endearment. So the sons of Korah after they repented were called Lilies (an allusion to Psalm xlv. 1), and David was called the Servant of God³." A familiar prayer opens with the words: "Thou givest a hand to transgressors, and thy right hand is stretched out to receive the penitent⁴." God is ready to cancel decrees of punishment and doom because of repentance. "Three things," it says in the Midrash, "can cancel evil decrees, namely, prayer, almsgiving, and repentance." To these three great specifics some would add change of name, good works, exile, and fasting. In the Talmud four things are mentioned as possessed of the power of annulling the decree of judgment: "almsgiving, prayer, change of name, and change of action (in repentance)⁵." The collocations are odd, and not without their dangers. Almsgiving and good works, regarded as preservatives from evil, open the door to superstitious formalism and to a degradation of charity. I pointed out before how

¹ Shemot R., xxxviii. § 4; Pesikta K., 160 a seq.; Pesikta R., 184 b.

² Vayikra R., iii. § 3.

³ Vayikra R., vii. § 2; Mid. Tehillim on Ps. xviii (3).

⁴ Singer's Prayer-book, pp. 61 and 267.

⁵ Bereshit R., xlv. § 12; Vayikra R., x. § 5; Rosh Ha-Shanah, 16 b; Aboth, iv. 15.

the fantastic idea was adopted that God judged the world between New Year and the Day of Atonement. The fancy took root, and it largely pervades the Jewish Liturgy. Thus in the prayer-book for the Day of Atonement, according to the German and Polish ritual, there is a prayer to which great importance is attached and which goes into the strangest details. These are, however, largely taken from the Talmud. On the New Year we are told it is inscribed, and on Atonement it is sealed, who are to live and who are to die, and of those doomed to death, who are to die young and who old, who by sword and who by famine, who by pestilence and who by fire, and so on. But, it is added, "repentance, prayer, and almsgiving cancel the evil decree." It would be interesting if a future historian of the Jews could inquire into the religious and ethical results of these conceptions for evil and for good.

In the Talmud an almost comic turn is given to the doctrine of God's desire to forgive by the remark, based upon a queer interpretation of 2 Sam. xxiii. 1-3, that if God rules over man, the righteous rule over him, because "if God ordains a decree, the righteous cancel it." A strange prayer to himself is put into God's mouth: "May it be my will that my mercy overcomes my anger, so that I may deal with my creatures according to the attribute of mercy and not according to strict justice¹." Thus God begs his children to repent while he is standing upon the attribute of mercy, for if he be on the attribute of justice, he will not know how to proceed².

As an illustration of Midrashic inconsistency, which one has to interpret according to its prevailing sentiment, I may quote the following passages, which in one form or another occur again and again. "Why is the plural used in the expression אֵין אֱלֹהִים? Because God is longsuffering both towards the righteous and the wicked. He is longsuffering towards the righteous in that he requites them in this world for the few sins which they have committed,

¹ Moed Katon, 16 b; Berachoth, 7 a.

² Pesikta R., 182 b.

so that they may receive their full reward in the world to come. He is longsuffering to the wicked in that he gives them ease in this world, and thus requites them for the few good deeds which they have done, in order to exact the full penalty of their sins in the world to come."

Another Rabbi said: "The plural indicates that God is longsuffering before he exacts requital, and he is longsuffering (i.e. gentle or slow) while he exacts it." R. Chanina said (and his saying is often quoted as a sort of corrective to a too easy-going conception of God): "He who says that God is longsuffering—that he leaves sin unpunished—may he suffer for his folly. God is longsuffering, but he exacts his due." R. Levi said: "His longsuffering consists in removing his wrath afar. It is like a king who had two cruel legions. The king said: If they are with me in the city, directly the inhabitants annoy me, they will fall upon them, and kill them: therefore I will send them away, and when the citizens anger me, during the time that I send for my troops and they arrive, the citizens may come and appease me. So God says: Wrath and anger are two angels of destruction, I will send them far away; when the Israelites anger me, before the angels arrive, the Israelites may repent and I shall receive their repentance." R. Isaac says: "God shuts the door behind the angels of wrath. Before he opens the door, his mercy is at hand¹."

God is not ashamed to state that he breaks his laws and leaves them unfulfilled in order that the Israelites may repent. Thus: "God told Jeremiah: Bid the Israelites repent. They replied: How can we repent? Have we not made God angry by our sins? Then God bade Jeremiah say: Though I declared I would destroy the sinner who should do what you have done, have I done so? No, for I am

¹ Pesikta K., 161 b. Cf. Buber's remarks in notes 93 seq. on this page; the translation given above follows the Pesikta as corrected by the Jerusalem Talmud (I. A.); Jer. Taanith, 65 b (Schwab, VI, p. 155); Baba Kamma, 50 a, &c., &c. (Bacher, *Agada der pal. Amoräer*, I, p. 8); cf. also Sanhedrin, III a.

merciful, and I keep not anger for ever. . . . It is before your father in heaven that ye come¹." "Beloved is repentance before God, for he cancels his own words for its sake. For it says in the Law, 'If a man take a wife and find some unseemly thing in her, he shall write her a bill of divorcement and send her away, and if she become another man's wife and he divorce her or die, then her former husband may not take her again to be his wife, after she is defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord.' But God does not act thus. Even though the Israelites have forsaken him (their husband) and served other gods, God says (Jer. iii. 1), Repent, draw near to me, and I will receive you²." Whatever arguments the Israelites adduce to show the hopelessness of repentance, God or his prophet is ready to cap them. Thus Jeremiah bade them repent, and said, Where are your fathers who sinned? They replied, Where are your prophets who did *not* sin? Then both quote Zechariah (for chronology does not exist for the Rabbis), and Jeremiah wins the day. Again he bids them repent, and they say, If a master sell his slave, or a man divorce his wife, what have they any more to do with each other? Then through his prophet God replies: "Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement? Or to whom have I sold you? Only sin separates you from me. Therefore return." "Nebuchadnezzar," says Resh-Lakish, "was called God's servant to meet this very argument, for if a servant acquires property, to whom does that property belong³?" Israel, though acquired by Nebuchadnezzar the servant, still belonged to the servant's Master.

The Rabbis are fond of illustrating God's readiness to accept the penitent by pointing out the difference between God's ways and man's ways. The following are examples: "If one man has offended another, it is uncertain if he will let himself be appeased at all, and even so, if he will be

¹ Pesikta K., 165 a.

² Pesikta R., 184 a; Yoma, 86 b.

³ Sanhedrin, 105 a.

satisfied with mere words, but God only demands words, and is even grateful to receive them¹." "If a man has put his neighbour openly to shame, and wants to be reconciled to him, the neighbour says, You put me to open shame and want a private reconciliation! Fetch the people before whom you spoke ill of me, and I will be reconciled. God is not so; a man reviles and blasphemes him in the open street, and God says, Repent in secret and I will receive you." "If a man commits a crime, he is inscribed for ever in the books of the government, but if a man sin against God and repent, God washes away the entry of his sin." "To an earthly king a man goes full and returns empty; to God he goes empty and returns full." "Man writes an accusation against his fellow, and (only) withdraws it for much money: God writes an accusation, and withdraws it for mere words (i. e. repentance, Hosea xiv. 2)." "Man leaps suddenly upon his enemy to do him evil, but God warned Pharaoh before each plague that he might repent." "A man can shoot an arrow a few furlongs, but repentance reaches to the throne of glory²."

The Rabbinic doctrine is perhaps best summed up in a familiar passage from the *Pesikta*³: "Who is like God, a teacher of sinners that they may repent? They asked Wisdom, What shall be the punishment of the sinner? Wisdom answered: Evil pursueth sinners (Prov. xiii. 21). They asked Prophecy. It replied: The soul that sinneth shall die (Ezek. xviii. 4). They asked the Law. It replied: Let him bring a sacrifice (Lev. i. 4). They asked God, and he replied: Let him repent and obtain his atonement. My children, what do I ask of you? Seek me and live."

Scattered throughout the Rabbinical literature are sayings in praise of repentance and its results. We find a number of them in *Yoma*. "Great is repentance for it

¹ *Yoma*, 86 b.

² *Yoma*, 86 b; *Pesikta K.*, 163 b; *Sifri*, § 134; *Pesikta R.*, 183 a, 185 a; *Shemot R.*, ix. § 9; *Pesikta K.*, 163 a.

³ *Pesikta K.*, 158 b; *Jer. Maccoth*, ii. 6 (*Schwab XI*, p. 89).

brings healing upon the world." "Great is repentance for it reaches to the throne of glory." "Great is repentance for it brings redemption to Israel." The question is discussed whether the Messiah's coming is dependent upon Israel's repentance. One distinguished Rabbi said, "The period of the redemption depends solely upon repentance and good works." Then two others dispute as to whether Israel will be redeemed even without repentance, and the question is not decided with certainty. Elsewhere we read that, "the Messiah will come at his appointed day, whether the Israelites repent or no, but if they made complete repentance, God would send him even before his time." Another Rabbi, with fine exaggeration, declares that, "if the Israelites repented for a single day, the redemption would ensue." And God is made to say, "It depends upon yourselves. As the lily blooms and her heart is turned upward, so if you repent and your heart is turned upward, in that very hour I will bring the Redeemer¹."

Thus, "as a garment which is dirty can be washed and made clean, so the Israelites, though sinful, can by repentance make themselves clean before God²." It is disputed whether the penitent or the righteous who have not sinned occupy the higher place, but the general view is that where the penitent stand the righteous stand not³. "Better," said R. Jacob, "is one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world than the whole life of the world to come; yet better is one hour of blissfulness of spirit in the world to come than the whole life of this world⁴."

We have seen that the Rabbis distinguished between a repentance of fear and a repentance of love; and also that the sincerity of repentance was mainly proved by its results. Occasionally we find sentences which speak of that element of repentance which we sometimes call contrition. Thus

¹ Yoma, 86 a and 86 b; Sanhedrin, 97 b; Shemot R., xxv. § 12; Pesikta K., 163 b; Shir Rabba, v. 2; Mid. Tehillim on Ps. xlv. (3).

² Shemot R., xxiii. § 10.

³ Berachoth, 34 b; Sanhedrin, 99 a.

⁴ Aboth, iv. 24.

they quote and use Joel's adage, "Rend your hearts and not your garments." They speak of self-humiliation within the heart which is better than a thousand lashes upon the back. The mere sense of shame is sufficient, says one, to secure forgiveness. Another declares that, "he who sacrifices his evil desire and confesses his sin is regarded as if he had honoured God in this world and in the world to come." So, too, he who humbles his spirit is regarded as if he had offered all the sacrifices of the law; while he who sins and is sorry is at once forgiven¹. It is in accordance with their high estimate of Repentance that it is formally declared to be a serious sin to remind a penitent of his former misdeeds².

The whole doctrine of Repentance as thus set forth is only applicable to earthly conditions. The prevailing opinion is that after death no further chance is allowed. It is curious that though the Rabbis accept the doctrine of purgatory, there are but few references to what would now seem the very obvious idea that the soul by its repentance after death can mitigate its punishment or shorten its purification. But, almost invariably, their doctrine on this subject is quite definite. "The crooked cannot be made straight." That is to say: "it can be made straight in this world, but not in the world to come." Thus the Midrash declares that there were two partners in sin; one repented before his death, the other did not. In the next world, the first is among the righteous, the second among the sinners. The latter sees the former, and says: "This man was my companion: we stole and did evil together, and why is he among the righteous and I among the sinners? Then they say: Thou fool! Thou wast dragged with cords to thy grave, and thy companion saw thy miserable fate and abandoned his evil ways, and his repentance has given him life and honour among the righteous. Thou also wast

¹ Berachoth, 7 a, 12 b; Sanhedrin, 43 b; Chaggigah, 5 a. The word used is מחורר.

² Baba Mezia, 58 b; cp. Sirach, viii. 5.

given the power to repent. Hadst thou done so, it would have been well with thee. Then he replies: I will go now and repent. But they say to him: Thou fool! This world is like the Sabbath; the world from which thou camest is like the day before the Sabbath. If a man has prepared nothing on the day before, what shall he eat on the Sabbath? This life is like the sea; that world is like the land. If a man has not got together food upon the land, what shall he eat upon the sea? This world is like the desert; that world is like the cultivated land (sic). If a man has not gathered food in the one, what shall he eat in the other? This world is like the days of winter; that world is like the days of summer. If a man does not plough in the summer, what shall he eat in the winter? This world is like the dining-hall; that world is like the ante-chamber. If a man has not prepared himself in the ante-chamber, shall he be allowed to enter into the hall?" So, too, it is said: "While a man lives, God hopes for his repentance; but after his death, his hope has gone. It is like a band of robbers who lay in prison. One of them found an opening by which all escaped save one. To him the overseer said: Thou unfortunate! Here was a hole, and thou didst not creep through it! So God says to the sinner: The way of repentance lay open before you. You did not use it: your hope is lost." So, too, it is said: "In this world God can be bribed by prayer and repentance, but not in the world to come. Therefore he says: So long as the gates of prayer are open, repent; for I take bribes in this world, but not when I sit in judgment¹." To feel shame in the next world will not help you. But those who have felt shame in this world will not have to feel shame in the next. To encounter the day of judgment with success a man must have acquired his advocates (*parakletoi*) on earth: these advocates are good works and repentance, and then, though nine hundred and ninety-nine accuse

¹ Midrash Ruth, on i. 17; Mid. Koheleth, on i. 15, vii. 15; Mid. Proverbs, on vi. 6; cf. Bemidbar Rabba, xi. § 7, xiv. § 6; Mid. Tehillim on Ps. xvii. (5).

him, he will be delivered by that one among a thousand of whom Elihu spoke of old¹.

There are, however, some stray passages in the Rabbinical literature in which a successful repentance after death is alluded to and affirmed. The leading idea in these passages has some connexion with the efficacy of prayers by the living on behalf of the dead². But restricting our attention to the passages in which the dead themselves are represented as accomplishing their own salvation, it is obvious that the importance and interest of these rare utterances are so great that they deserve special attention. The first passage to which allusion must be made occurs in the Talmud (Erubin, 19 a). Rabbi Joshua b. Levi comments on Psalm lxxxiv. 7: עוברי בעמק הבכה מעין ישיחותיו גם ברכות יעטם מורה ["Who passing through the valley of weeping make it a place of springs: the early rain also covereth it with blessings"], and he says: "The word עוברי signifies the sons of men who transgress (עוברים) the will of the Holy One; עמק signifies that they deepen Hell for themselves [i. e. after death]; הבכה means that they weep and let their tears fall like the stream [of wine] [that fell during a whole year] in the reservoir [under the altar]; גם ברכות יעטם מורה signifies that they admit the justice of their condemnation, and say: Well hast thou judged, well hast thou acquitted, well hast thou condemned, well hast thou ordained Gehinnom for the wicked and the Garden of Eden for the righteous." The Talmud continues: "Is this indeed so? Has not Simon b. Lakish said: 'The wicked, even at the gate of Gehinnom, do not return in repentance? As it is said (Isa. lxvi. 24): ויצאו וראו בפגרי: האנשים הפשעים בי. It is not written שפשעו (who have transgressed), but הפשעים (who still transgress), for they go on

¹ Shemot Rabba, Par. xxx. § 19 fin. (Bacher, *Agada der Tannaiten*, I, p. 432); Sabbath, 32 a.

² The subject of prayer for the benefit of the dead by the living lies outside my limits. Cp., however, the article by Israel Lévi in *Revue des Études Juives*, vol. XXIX, p. 43 seq. It may be stated here that the famous prayer in 2 Macc. xii. 44 has no parallel in early Rabbinic literature.

sinning eternally. This is no difficulty ; for the one refers to Israelite transgressors, the other to heathen transgressors.' ”

This passage clearly implies that an Israelite sinner at least may repent successfully even after death. This is more definitely stated in a passage in the Yalkut Shimeoni to Isa. xxvi. 2, and again in the Midrash called the Alphabet of Rabbi Akiba (8th century A.C.), printed in Jellinek's *Beth Hamidrash*, vol. III, pp. 12-64). Commenting on the text פתחו שערים ויבא גוי צדיק שמר אמונים, and explaining the last words to mean שאומרים אמן, the Yalkut says: “For the sake of a single *Amen* which the wicked answer in the midst of Gehinnom, they are delivered from its midst.” In the *Seder R. Amram*¹ (ed. Warsaw, p. 13 b) David is cited as singing praises to God, whereupon the righteous in Paradise answer *Amen* and the wicked in Gehinnom do likewise. God inquires: “Who are answering *Amen*?” The angels respond: “These are the sinners of Israel, who despite that they are in great distress, make a strong effort (מתחוקים) and say *Amen* before thee.” Immediately God says to the angels: “Open for them the gates of Paradise, that they may sing before me,” as it is written, &c. (citing Isa. xxvi. 2). This is evidently a variant of the passage which I now proceed [to quote, but its appearance in the prayer-book of R. Amram indicates that some value was attached to the view that the response *Amen* was efficacious for salvation in the future as in the present life.

“The sin of the wicked in Israel is accounted to them as righteousness in the hour when they see the entrance to Gehinnom and accept of themselves the judgment of Gehinnom. And straightway they are brought up and they repent before God, and they are received before the Shechinah like the righteous who have never sinned, and they receive a reward for every sin as if it were righteous-

¹ For some minor features in the passage in R. Amram cf. Pesachim, 119. There is also a parallel to the main idea in Tana debe Eliahu Zutta, ch. xx (I. A.).

ness. . . . They are made to sit in the assembly near the Shechinah, because they broke their heart in repentance before the Holy One." A little before, the following extraordinary passage occurs (p. 27 fin. p. 28, repeated with slight variations in the Yalkut, loc. cit.):

"The Holy One will sit in the Garden of Eden and study [the Law], and all the righteous sit before him, and all the angels stand around. On God's right are the sun and the planets and the moon, on his left are the stars, and God explains to them the meanings of the new law which he is going to give them through the Messiah. And when they have finished the lesson (hagada), Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel stands on his feet and says [the Kaddish], May he be magnified and sanctified! and his voice goes from one end of the world to another, and all the world (בְּאֵי הָעוֹלָם) answer Amen, and even the wicked of Israel and the righteous of the nations who are left in Gehinnom answer and say Amen from the midst of Gehinnom, till the whole universe resounds, and their voice is heard by God. And he asks, 'What is this great noise which I have heard?' The angels of the service answer and say: 'Lord, these are the wicked in Israel and the righteous of the nations who are left in Gehinnom, and answer Amen from the midst of Gehinnom¹.' Straightway the compassion of the Holy One is stirred exceedingly, and he says: 'What shall I add to the punishment they have already borne? It is the Evil Inclination which has caused them to sin.' Then God takes the keys of Gehinnom, and gives them to Michael and Gabriel before all the righteous, and says to them: 'Go and open the gates of Gehinnom, and bring them up from Gehinnom, as it is said, Open the gates, and a righteous people shall come through them who keep faithfulness' (Isa. xxvi. 2). Straightway Michael and Gabriel go and open the 40,000² gates of Gehinnom, and bring them up from Gehinnom. . . . They take them by the hand, and bring them up as a man lifts up his

¹ In the Yalkut the passage adds here the words, "and acknowledge the justice of their punishment."

² Another reading is 8,000.

neighbour and brings him by a cord from a pit, and the angels wash and anoint them, and heal them from the wounds of Gehinnom and clothe them in fair raiment, and take them by the hand, and bring them before God and before all the righteous, as though they had been made priests and men of honour, as it is said, 'Thy priests shall be clothed with salvation, and thy saints shall rejoice in goodness' (2 Chron. vi. 41). 'Thy priests': these are the righteous of the nations, who are priests before God in this world, like Antoninus the son of Severus and his fellows; and 'thy saints': these are the wicked in Israel, who are called saints, as it is said, 'Gather my saints together unto me' (Ps. l. 5). And when the angels bring them to the gate of the Garden of Eden, the angels enter first and take counsel with the Holy One; then the Holy One says: 'Let them enter and see my glory.' And when they enter they fall on their faces, and worship and bless and praise his name¹."

The reader will have noticed the strange use of Biblical texts in these interesting extracts. It would be an interesting point for a scholar to consider how far the various dicta, and even the various opinions, of the Rabbis were influenced by literal or strained interpretations of Biblical passages, or whether these interpretations were merely dragged in to substantiate an opinion which was already formed. In any case, the Biblical verses doubtless affected the manner in which the opinions were enunciated. A few of the more favourite passages as regards repentance may now be pointed out.

The favourite quotation, as I mentioned before, is doubtless the opening of the last chapter of Hosea. "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast

¹ This striking and picturesque passage is quoted in a fascinating article by the Rev. S. Singer, entitled, "Is Salvation possible after death?" (*Homiletical Review*, May, 1885, p. 283). The passage from the "Alphabet of R. Akiba," is also cited in English in Stähelin, *Rabbinical Literature* (London, 1748, vol. II, p. 68).

stumbled by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and return unto the Lord; say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and accept that which is good, so will we render as bullocks the offering of our lips." In these verses the Rabbinic fathers found the full doctrine of repentance and confession. Here, too, they found the basis for their view that prayer, confession, and repentance are God's chosen substitutes for sacrifice and burnt-offering.

Next to this passage, they found, perhaps, the eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel most fruitful. "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?" Jeremiah's exhortations, too, are quoted again and again. "Return, O backsliding children. I am merciful. I will not keep anger for ever." The Psalmist's "broken and contrite heart" is also much appealed to; and the allusions are frequent to the verse, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered," with its apparently contradictory sequence, "Mine iniquity I have not hid," and to the verse in Proverbs, "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy." The contradiction is prettily explained by one Rabbi on the assumption that the sin which is covered refers to sins against God, the sin which is openly confessed to sins against man¹.

The foregoing quotations from scripture were interpreted in their literal sense. I may now give two or three examples of unnatural or homiletic exegesis. We saw how "Peace, peace to the far and to the near" was used to assess the worth of the penitent. So, too, the view of the Psalmist, "A people which shall be created shall praise the Lord," is explained to refer to sinners who repent and pray before God at New Year and the Day of Atonement, and who, because they change their deeds, are, as it were, created by God anew².

¹ Yoma, 86 b; cf. Maimonides on Repentance, ii. 5.

² Midrash Tehillim on Ps. cii. (3).

It would take me too long and too far to mention the odd changes of vowels and letters which the Midrash sometimes indulges in to prove or illustrate its points, but reference must be made to two more Biblical texts which are constantly appealed to. The first is the enumeration of the divine attributes in Exodus xxxiv or Numbers xiv. The Hebrew idiom of expressing emphasis by putting the infinitive before the finite verb was possibly no longer familiar or intelligible to the Rabbis. At any rate, for homiletical reasons, they explain that the phrase, וְנִקָּה לֹא יִנָּקֶה, must have a special meaning, for here, they say, it is distinctly stated that God will and that God will not acquit (the sinner). The explanation of the contradiction is that God will only acquit those who have repented of their sins¹. The second passage to which I would refer is the third verse of the ninetieth Psalm: "Thou turnest man to destruction: then thou sayest, Return, ye children of men." This is the invariable Biblical support for the Rabbinic doctrine that repentance was created before the world. Before, that is, God had formed the world, the divine voice had already proclaimed the necessity and the value of repentance. The first part of the verse is interpreted to mean, Thou bringest man to contrition; the second is the summons to repentance. Or again, "Thou turnest man to destruction" is supposed to signify, "Thou causest him to turn until he is crushed": in other words, God accepts repentance up till the very moment of death. I may add that the verb *shub* is so associated in the Rabbinic mind with repentance, that, as in this interpretation of the ninetieth Psalm, they can hardly conceive it possible for it to mean anything else. A curious illustration of this tendency can be found in a verse from the Books of Kings, where it is stated of Josiah that there was no king like unto him who *turned* unto the Lord with all his heart. Hence one Rabbi infers that Josiah was a great penitent².

¹ Yoma, 86 a; cf. Sifri, 33 a.

² Sabbath, 56 b.

Other Biblical heroes are connected by the Rabbis with the subject of repentance and with better reason than in the case of Josiah. Thus it is stated of Adam that God wanted him to repent and opened the door thereto, but Adam was too proud to humble himself, and therefore he was driven from Paradise. Cain, on the other hand, did repent, and therefore at least half his punishment was remitted him. The Midrash tells how Adam, meeting Cain, asked how his case stood. Upon which Cain replies: I repented and the matter is settled (I have been forgiven). Adam struck his face with amazement and said, I did not know that the power of repentance was so great. He at once composed and recited the ninety-second psalm: "It is good to confess (להודות) unto the Lord¹."

Of Abraham, on the other hand, we are told that he was appointed to lead the whole world to repentance. The meaning of this statement seems to be that Abraham is regarded as the great proselyte and proselyte-maker. He was therefore the first to lead men away from the falsehood and sin of idolatry into the purity and rectitude of monotheistic belief. Commenting upon the story of Abraham's vision in the night, the Midrash observes that Abraham was at first unable to drive the birds of prey from the carcass, but finally succeeded in doing so through repentance. Here the birds are regarded as a type of the persecutions from which the Israelites would have to suffer².

The next Biblical character connected with repentance is Reuben. He repented of his part in the plot against Joseph, and God said to him: "Not till now has a man sinned before me and repented; thou art the first who has repented, therefore thy descendant shall be the first to

¹ Tanehuma חורץ; Bemidbar Rabba, xiii. § 3; Bereshit Rabba, xxii. ad fin.; Mid. Tehillim on Ps. c. (2); Vayikra R., x. § 5. In the last place the Cain story is used as an illustration in the argument between R. Jehuda and R. Joshua b. Levi, of whom the former asserts that repentance does half and prayer does all, while the latter said that prayer does half and repentance does all.

² Bereshit R., xxx. § 9, xliv. § 17.

summon the Israelites to repentance. Thou wouldst have brought back the beloved son to his father: thy descendant shall bring back the Israelites to their father in heaven¹." This descendant was Hosea. It was the tribe of Reuben who encamped on the south side, for from the south come dew and rain, and Reuben is the typical penitent, and through the worth of repentance rain falls upon the earth. Judah is the type of the Law, and therefore Judah set forth first; Reuben is the type of repentance and therefore Reuben set forth second, for repentance is (only) second (in importance) to the Law. Elsewhere the large offering of the "prince of the children of Reuben" (Num. vii. 30-35) is said to be typical of, or to correspond with, Reuben's repentance when Joseph was sold, for repentance, it is characteristically added, is equivalent to all the sacrifices of the Law².

In the same Midrash an eccentric remark is made about Balaam. The reason why he said to the angel "I have sinned," was because he knew that if a man sins and confesses, the angels have no power to hurt him³. The subject of repentance is also referred to in connexion with the golden calf, but I have noticed nothing worth quotation, except perhaps the odd idea of R. Joshua b. Levi that the Israelites only made the calf, just as David only committed the sin with Bathsheba and Uriah, in order to encourage sinners to become penitents and to return to God. Thus if an individual sin, one can say: "even as David repented, so do thou repent;" and if a community sin, one can say: "even as Israel repented, so do thou repent⁴." Elsewhere also David is regarded as an example for penitents and sinners. It was he who said to God, "You are a great God, and my sins are great. It beseems the great God to pardon

¹ The *first* penitent is variously named by different Rabbis as Cain, Abraham, Reuben, &c.

² Bereshit R., lxxxiv. § 19; Bemidbar R., ii. § 10, iii. § 12 (on Num. ii. 9, 16), xiii. § 18; Pesikta K., 159 b.

³ Bemidbar R., xx, § 15.

⁴ Shemot R., i. § 36; Bemidbar, xx. § 20; Sanhedrin, 7a; Aboda Zarah, 4 b.

great sins." "Let every one who has sinned look at David; for it is said, Behold, for a witness to the peoples I have appointed him." "David said to God, If thou receivest me, then sinners will submit to thee, and they will look at me, and I shall be a witness that thou receivest the penitent." Playing upon and mispunctuating a verse in Samuel (2 Sam. xxiii. 1), a Rabbi says of David that he set up "the yoke of repentance"¹.

In many passages Jehoiachin or Coniah is pointed to as a salient example of the power of repentance in cancelling the divine oath and decree. For Jeremiah said, "As I live, saith the Lord, write ye this man childless," whereas in Chronicles we are told of his sons².

But the penitent whose story is most frequently quoted, and who is most often used to point the moral, is Manasseh. Manasseh was the worst of all the kings of Judah, and yet he repented, and his repentance was accepted. For when the wicked king was carried to Babylon, bound in fetters and chains, and thrown, according to the legend, into a fiery furnace, he called upon all the gods of the world to whom he had sacrificed, and none made answer. "Then he called upon God, and said, Lord, I have called upon all the gods of the world, and now I have realized that they are things of naught. Thou art the God of gods: if Thou dost not hearken to me, I shall think that Thou and they are as one. Then the angels arose, and stopped up all the windows of heaven, and they said, Wilt Thou, O Lord, accept the repentance of a man who set up an idol in the very temple itself? But God replied, If I accept him not in his repentance, I shut the door upon all penitents. Wherefore God bored a hole under the throne of his glory, and received Manasseh's prayer." Elsewhere it is said, "If a man comes and says, God does not receive the penitent, then Manasseh will bear witness that there was no worse man in the world

¹ Vayikra R., v. ad fin.; Mid. Tehillim on Ps. xl. (2), li. (3); Aboda Zarah, 5 a; Moed Katon, 16 b.

² Vayikra R., x. § 5; Pesikta K., 163

than he, and yet in the hour of his repentance God received him." In a famous section of Mishnah Sanhedrin, it is stated that Manasseh is one of the three kings who have no share in the world to come. But R. Jehuda said that Manasseh has his portion in the world to come, while R. Jochanan averred that "to deny such a portion to Manasseh is to make the hands of all penitents be slack¹."

As the Jews have been often said to be very ready to criticize themselves while objecting to criticism from others, so we find some shrewd sayings about their history in connexion with our own particular subject. Thus we are told that Pharaoh's pursuit had a greater effect upon the Israelites than a hundred fast days and endless prayers. For in their fear they looked up to God and repented of their sins. And frequently it is said that sufferings or chastisements have been the means of Israel's repentance. The nation is compared to an olive, the oil of which is produced by beating. So repentance is brought about by suffering. Not till the Israelites are brought so low that they eat the fruit of the carob, do they repent before God. For poverty adorns the Jew as a red rein adorns a piebald horse². Hence, too, the many passages about suffering being beloved, both because through sufferings Israel has received precious gifts, and because suffering is the best atonement for sin³.

On the other hand, as we have already partly seen, God is represented as the loving father of Israel who hates to punish and longs to save. Rabbi Meir said, "Israel is God's son who has been driven away by his pride and sinfulness from his father's house (i. e. Palestine); but the son

¹ Bemidbar Rabba, xiv. § 1; Midrash Ruth, v. § 6; Debarim R., ii. § 20; Pesikta K., 162 a; Sanhedrin, 90 a, 103 a; Jer. Sanhedrin, 28 c (Schwab, xi. p. 50), &c.

² Shemot R., xxi. § 5, xxxvi. § 1; Megilla, 14 a; Echa R. on iv. 22; Shir R. on i. 3; Vayikra R., xiii. § 4.

³ Cf. Mid. Tehillim on Ps. xciv. (2), cxviii. (16).

will repent and be restored ¹." Sometimes, but much more rarely, and only in contrast to the nations, Israel is depicted as specially susceptible to the gracious goodness of God. Only once or twice have I noticed a desire to extol the Rabbi or the student of the law. Thus we find it said that if you have seen a Rabbi commit a sin at night time, you may be sure that he has repented of it by the following day. And Akiba declared that as vessels of gold and crystal when broken can be mended, so for the student of the law (moral) repair is still possible. But in another place the very same thing is said of man generally: "Let not a man say, 'Because I have sinned, no repair is possible for me,' but let him trust in God, and repent and God will receive him ²." The ordinary view seems to be that it is only through divine encouragement and help, as well as through the gracious ordinance of the Day of Atonement, that Israel and the individual Israelite find their way to repentance.

It cannot be denied that the particularism of the Rabbis and of the Rabbinical religion is often apparent in their doctrine of *Teshubah*. So far from the common charge being true that their God was distant, we may rather say that he was sometimes too near, or more accurately: the real and true God, as we now conceive him, in his loving relations to all mankind, was by the Rabbis restricted in large measure to Israel.

Thus in one place we find the Israelites likened to the angelic hosts. As they, according to the popular legend, are "renewed day by day, and return, after they have praised God, to the fire from which they issued, so too the Israelites, if their evil passions ensnare them in sin, and they repent, are forgiven by God year by year and granted a new heart with which to fear him." Nebuchadnezzar

¹ Bacher, *Agada der Tannaiten*, II, p. 35; cf. Jer. Taanith, 3 a (Schwab, VI, 142-144).

² Berachoth, 19 a; Chaggigah, 15 a; Mid. Tehillim on Ps. xl. (3). The word translated by "repair" is תּוּקָה.

told his general that the God of the Jews receives the penitent; therefore, "when they are conquered, give them no opportunity to pray, lest they repent and their God have pity upon them ¹."

God, then, is ever on the watch, eager for Israel's repentance. "It all depends upon you," he tells them. "My part I am always ready to perform." But more than that, God is represented as showing a certain special leniency to the Israelites. A Rabbi said: "If one may venture to say so, though with God is no forgetfulness, yet because of the Israelites he is forgetful. If the scales of a man's virtues and sins are equal, God removes one of the sins and makes the scale incline toward mercy." I do not find it definitely said that he only does this for the Israelites, but the context in which these passages occur renders it likely that this qualification is implied ².

The Midrash refers occasionally to the Gentiles when it touches on repentance. Thus it says that God let the seven days of mourning for the pious Methuselah pass by before he brought on the flood, to see if the inhabitants of the world would repent, but they would not. Similarly a chance of repentance was given to the tower builders of Babel, and even to the Sodomites, but it was not used. One Rabbi declares: "God does not desire to condemn any creature. When his creatures sin and provoke him, and he is angry with them, what does the Holy One do? He seeks an advocate for them to plead for their merit and he opens a path before the advocate. Thus, when the Sodomites sinned, he revealed to Abraham to plead for their merit God warned the men of Sodom for fifty-two years, and shook the mountains over them, that they might repent." Elsewhere it is said "that God is 'glorious in power' (Exod. xv. 7) because he granted respite to the

¹ Shemot R., xv. § 6; Echa R. on v. 5.

² Pesikta K., p. 167 a; cf. Jer. Kiddushin, i. fin. (Schwab, ix. pp. 237, 238); Jer. Peah, 4 b (Schwab, ii. 20, 21) and Jer. Taanith, 3 a (Schwab, vi. 144) with its particularistic interpretation of Isa. xxi. 12.

generation of the deluge, and to the men of the Tower and to the Sodomites to repent, but they would not. Even at the last, had the Sodomites repented, God would have rained upon them (only) rain, but as they refused, he rained sulphur and fire." In one passage, which reappears with modifications in more than one Midrash, the nations are credited with a greater readiness to repentance than the Israelites. One of the reasons, we are told, why Jonah shirked executing God's message to Nineveh, was because he feared that the repentance of the Ninevites would not only secure their forgiveness, but assure God's anger against Israel. Jonah thought: "The nations are ready to repent at once, and God will be angry with Israel and say, The nations to whom I gave no statutes repent forthwith, when I issue a decree against them, whereas with Israel it is not so, for I frequently send them my prophets, but they continue stiff-necked¹." And we find the saying, "God waits for all the peoples of the world, if haply they will repent and come under his wings."

More usual, however, is the thought of which, for example, we have an instance where it says, "If thou repent, God will lift up his countenance to thee,—to thee, that is, and not to another nation." The attitude of the persecuted to the persecutors, not unnatural, yet not the highest of which mankind is capable, is faithfully reflected in the following passage. Commenting on Canticles viii. 8, "We have a little sister," which it interprets of Israel, the Midrash remarks: "Rabbi Azariah said in the name of R. Jehuda bar Simon, The patron angels of the nations will accuse the Israelites before God and say, Lord of the world, like other nations the Israelites have committed idolatry and unchastity and have shed innocent blood. Why then do they not, like the other nations, descend into hell? Because, replies God, they are to me as a little sister. As one forgives a little child whatever it does, because it is little, so it is with

¹ Tanchuma, ויקרא (ed. Lublin, 1879, Part II, p. 11); Mechilta, i b; Pirke R. Eliezer, x.

the Israelites. However much they pollute themselves by their sins throughout the year, the Day of Atonement brings them forgiveness¹."

It is not easy to assess at its real moral and religious worth or unworth the particularism of the Rabbis. Undoubtedly they believed that the very large majority of those who would enjoy the blessedness of the world to come would be Israelites, just as, I suppose, up till modern times, the various sects of Christianity have believed that the very large majority of heaven's inhabitants would be themselves. Yet the partiality or particularism of the Rabbinic literature is somehow very unlike the arid and wholly disagreeable particularism of some of the apocalyptic and pseud-epigraphic writings. It is more naïve and less virulent. However wrong and unjust it may be, it somehow partakes of the *general* superiority of the Rabbinical over the Apocalyptic literature. It would be unfair to say that the particularism of the Rabbis marks a recurrence to the old pre-prophetic point of view. In the pre-prophetic period Yahweh is not yet wholly moralized: he is frankly the God of Israel who must protect his own. Israel's victories are his; so too are Israel's defeats. To the prophets, though Yahweh is in a special sense the God of Israel, for that very reason Israel must be punished for his sins, and Israel's fall is Yahweh's triumph. With the Rabbis, God is once more partial, but, if one may say so, it is a moralized partiality. Excuses and justifications are sought for it. Nor can it be said, in spite of passages such as the one last quoted, that the Rabbinic conception of God's relation to Israel is in itself, and apart from its contrast with his relation to the "nations," immoral or crudely partial. The wilder statements of the Midrash and the Talmud must be taken with a grain of salt, and the conflicting ones balanced against each other. God eagerly

¹ Bereshit R., xxxii. § 7; xxxviii. § 9; xlix. § 6; Bemidbar R., x. § 1; Tanchuma, section וירא on Gen. xix. 1 and section בשלח on Exod. xv. 12; Mechilta, 38a (ed. Friedmann); Pesikta K., 156a; Mid. Shir on viii. 8.

accepts Israel's repentance: he helps the Israelites to repent: he grieves for their sorrows and their sins; he is anxious to redeem them. But, at the same time, we have seen that he is not only the God of mercy, but also the God of justice. The unrepentant sinner is condemned by him, and if the sinner persist in his sin, repentance is likely to be unattainable. God is longsuffering both to the good and to the wicked, though among the reasons given for this attribute of his are some which hardly appeal to us to-day¹. Yet on the whole we may, I think, say that the Rabbinic conception of God's relation to *Israel* is what the modern believer in God conceives to be the relation of God to *man*. The prayers which are offered up to God from the orthodox Jewish prayer-book are such as might be offered up in any modern Theistic church, if for Israel we, in many places, substitute mankind. "O Thou who openest thy hand to repentance, to receive transgressors and sinners, whose right hand is stretched out to receive the penitent"—such an invocation is purely human². We may even go a little further. For it should in fairness be said that, on the whole, the liturgy of the synagogue is rather markedly free from definite and irreligious particularism. There are also included in it prayers of a strongly universalistic tinge, and it is noteworthy that such prayers find a prominent place upon the New Year and upon the Day of Atonement. Thus, for instance, we read:—

Now, therefore, O Lord our God, impress thine awe upon all thy works, and thy dread upon all that thou hast created, that all works may fear thee, and all creatures prostrate themselves before thee, that they may all form a single band to do thy will with a perfect heart, even as we know, O Lord our God, that dominion is thine, strength is in thy hand, and might in thy right hand, and that thy name is to be feared above all that thou hast created.

A prayer which was originally composed for the New

¹ Cf. the pretty argument between God and Moses, Sanhedrin, 111 a, but also Pesikta K., 161 b.

² Singer's Prayer-book, p. 61. These prayers are very old.

Year service has now become incorporated into the liturgy for every day :—

We, therefore, hope in thee, O Lord our God, that we may speedily behold the glory of thy might, when thou wilt remove the abominations from the earth, and the idols will be utterly cut off, when the world will be perfected under the kingdom of the Almighty, and all the children of flesh will call upon thy name, when thou wilt turn unto thyself all the wicked of the earth. Let all the inhabitants of the world perceive and know that unto thee every knee must bow, every tongue must swear. Before thee, O Lord our God, let them bow and fall ; and unto thy glorious name let them give honour ; let them all accept the yoke of thy kingdom, and do thou reign over them speedily, and for ever and ever. For the kingdom is thine, and to all eternity thou wilt reign in glory ; as it is written in thy Law, The Lord shall reign for ever and ever¹.

Summing up the evidence thus far presented, we may fairly assert that the Rabbinic teaching about repentance is closely akin to that Jewish teaching of the latter end of the nineteenth century, A.C., to which I referred at the beginning of this Address. The main differences are first, that, as we have seen, the Rabbinic doctrine is, on the whole, particularist, while the modern teaching is pronouncedly universalist, and secondly, that the Rabbis are sterner towards the sinner, especially towards the *religious* sinner,—the heretic, the apostate, the unbeliever. Lastly, whereas according to the modern teaching, all punishment after death can only be remedial and temporary, the Rabbis held that for some sinners there was no share whatever in the blessedness of the world to come².

Yet for the average Israelite of the Rabbinic period the doctrines of Repentance, of the mercy and lovingkindness of God, and of the Atonement Day, sufficed to make his

¹ Singer's Prayer-book, pp. 239, 247.

² Some Rabbis taught eternal punishment ; others, annihilation. There are some curious and difficult passages relating to these matters in connection with repentance. Cf. Mid. Koheleth on ix. 4 ; Jer. Berachoth, ix (Schwab, I, p. 156) ; Pesikta R., 198 b ; Rosh Ha-Shanah, 16 b, 17 a.

outlook upon life—apart from questions of persecution and martyrdom—one of cheerfulness and confidence. From the 'sea of the Talmud' everyone can draw deductions and find passages to suit his taste and his theory. It is therefore quite possible to quote stories or sentences which seem to indicate a condition of mistrust, of uncertainty, and of terror. But these stories and sentences are the exception and not the rule. It would be quite as erroneous to regard them as proving the prevailing temper of the Rabbinic creed, as it would be to quote the occasional sentences which make for toleration and universalism and to declare that these are the characteristic teachings of the Talmud. Both errors have been frequently committed by the friends and the foes of the Rabbinic religion: both are equally objectionable and unscientific.

But a puzzle remains to which I can only draw attention, but which I am unable to solve. There are parts of the Day of Atonement liturgy which suggest an attitude of gloom and apprehension. But from the Mishnah onward—and we must remember that the words of the Mishnah are older than the completed code—the prevailing religious attitude of the Jew is hopeful. His God is a God of mercy, and though to sin is human, no less human is repentance, and the most essential attribute of God is forgiveness. The Talmud itself calls attention to this characteristically Jewish point of view. "It is the custom," it observes, "among men when they appear before a court of justice to put on black clothes, and to let the beard grow long because of the uncertainty of the issue. Israelites do not act so: on the day when the judgment opens (the New Year), they are clad in white, and shave their beards, they eat and drink and rejoice in the conviction that God will do wonders for them¹." True repentance will turn voluntary sins into involuntary errors, and the stain of involuntary errors the Day of Atonement will wash away². The

¹ Jer. Rosh Ha-Shanah, i. 2 (Schwab, VI, p. 65).

² Yoma, 36 b, 86 b.

Mishnah declares in the most solemn manner that every Israelite, with certain specified exceptions, will have a share in the world to come. But when we turn from the Rabbinic to the Apocalyptic literature a different temper seems to prevail. There, if confidence exists, it is rather an arid pride of race than the justified hope of those who believe in a merciful God and in the efficacy and possibility of repentance. And when this unethical confidence is wanting, we find an anxiety and a mistrust utterly removed from and unfamiliar to the true Rabbinic religion. In the fourth book of Ezra, which is not so many years anterior to the Mishnah, the teaching is that many are "lost" and few are "saved." Instead of cheerful hope, there prevails a spirit of gloom and despair. The author of the Epistle to the Romans would seem to have been filled with such a spirit before his conversion, or at any rate to regard it as a logically justified condition of mind for those who do not yet believe in the atoning death and resurrection of Christ, or for those who rejected these newer doctrines and clung to the older teachings of the Law and of the Prophets. Whence comes this strange difference of belief and of attitude between the Apocalyptic and the Rabbinic literature, between the fourth book of Ezra and St. Paul on the one hand, and the Mishnah upon the other? Does this difference partly account for the fact that the apocalyptic and pseud-epigraphic writings have not survived in Hebrew, and that the Rabbis seem to have regarded them as off the true line of tradition and as heretical? The complete solution of this puzzle is still to seek.

Meanwhile, the Rabbinic cheerfulness has remained a characteristic of Judaism till the present day, and the doctrine of Repentance is one of its causes. Though Rabbinic and mediaeval Jews were in one sense particularist, in another sense they were universalist. The theory of repentance helped them to keep clear of the gloomy doctrines of election and reprobation. The Fourth Gospel knows nothing of repentance, because it divides the world

into children of light and children of darkness. From such teachings legal Judaism kept free. And this it partly owed to its doctrine of Repentance. Not unwisely, then, did the Rabbinic doctors declare, "There is nothing greater than repentance : repentance is second to the Law¹."

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¹ Debarim R., ii. § 24 init. ; Bemidbar R., ii. § 10.